The Impacts of Decreased Funding to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on Health

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Abstract

Forty-eight million Americans receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits – better known as food stamps. Congress is considering an almost $40 billion cut to SNAP via The Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act of 2013/HR 3102. These cuts may mean a worsening of hunger and health issues in the food insecure population.

H.R. 3102 would restrict current policies that allow states to determine eligibility for SNAP based on eligibility for other low-income assistance programs, causing 1.8 million people to lose SNAP benefits per year between 2014-2015. In addition, the bill would decrease eligibility to childless adults by increasing work restrictions and time limits to SNAP benefits, causing 7 million people to lose access to the program over the same time period. Finally, the bill would stop automatic SNAP eligibility for people who receive allowances for energy assistance payments. This change could affect 850,000 households per year and decrease SNAP benefits by $90 per month.

H.R. 3102 would increase food insecurity and the poverty rate (by 0.5%), leading to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and coronary artery disease in adults as well as higher rates of obesity, mental health issues, and learning disabilities in children. The US spent $67 billion in medical costs related to food insecurity in 2005. The increased health care costs for adult diabetes over the next ten years would eliminate almost half the cost savings proposed by cutting SNAP in this bill. Due to its negative impact on health, a NAY vote on H.R. 3102 is recommended.